

# Fightback

*Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism*

what is

CONSERVATIVE

leftism?



# Table of Contents

Against "conservative leftism" p3

*Daphne Lawless*

To the people: a reply p22

*Ben Peterson*

The opportunity for politics p26

*Ian Anderson*

Trump, Brexit, Syria... and  
conservative leftism p33

*Daphne Lawless*

On conservative leftism:  
a conversation p41

*Gregory W. and Daphne Lawless*

Fightback's Ten-Point Programme p54

How to get involved p56

*Cover: pro-Assad signs on a British Stop The War Coalition demonstration.*

*Edited by Ian Anderson*

*Typeset by Daphne Lawless*

*Published by Fightback, September 2017*

# Against “conservative leftism”

## Why reactionary responses to neoliberalism fail

*by Daphne Lawless. Originally published on the Fightback blog in February 2016, and in Fightback’s magazine issue on ‘Neoliberalism’.*

If you had told a socialist or a radical of a few decades ago that Marxist socialists would not only be defending the Union Jack-emblazoned New Zealand flag – a remnant of the British Empire, known as the “Butcher’s Apron” because of all the blood spilled on it, the flag of the colonialist, capitalist state – but marching behind it on demonstrations, they would undoubtedly think that you’d gone crazy. As recently as 2005, the “Defend Our Flag” movement was the preserve of conservatives like the Returned Services Association or the fascist National Front.

And yet, on the marches against the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) signing on 4<sup>th</sup> February, Union Jacks were plentiful. On Facebook, socialists and radicals were calling supporters of Kyle Lockwood’s

alternative flag, to be voted on in a referendum in March, “traitors”. How did this happen?

There’s a saying in American politics known as “Cleek’s Law”: “today’s conservatism is the opposite of whatever liberals want, updated daily”. This refers to the kneejerk opposition of Republicans to whatever the Obama regime does; to the point that wags suggest that Obama could wipe out all opposition by making a speech in favour of breathing.

In this article, I wish to introduce to the Aotearoa/New Zealand left the concept of *conservative leftism*. To adapt Cleek’s Law, it could be described as “conservative leftism is the opposite of whatever neoliberals want, updated daily”. Or to put it in more formal language: *a reactionary, undialectical opposition to various aspects of neoliberalism.*



*Demonstrators in Auckland against the TPPA fly the NZ flag, February 2016*

I argue that this is an extremely strong, sometimes dominant, political ideology on the Left in Aotearoa/New Zealand today.

Historically, Marxists have seen themselves as opposing “reformism” within the movements of workers and the oppressed – that is, Marxists believe that the real issue is to do away with capitalism altogether, not just

to reform it. But conservative leftism is a series of ideas which may be held by “reformist”, “revolutionary” or other forces in the movement – feminists, tino rangatiratanga fighters, queer activists, or unionists. It’s a response to both neoliberalism and to decades of defeat in the movement; and I will argue that it’s a backwards-looking, self-defeating response, to which a

strong political alternative should be built.

## Definitions

I take the concept of “conservative leftism” from the Scottish socialist Sam Charles Hamad. He uses the phrase, in particular, to describe those segments of Left opinion in Britain – up to and including left-leaning Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn – who refuse support to the Syrian revolution, and instead support intervention in favour of the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad, sometimes as a “lesser evil” compared to the Da’esh (ISIS) sectarian terror group. The crucial point is that, whereas a right-wing conservative or a Tony Blair-style neoliberal would be in favour of British or American bombs, the conservative leftists seem to be in favour of *Russian* or *Iranian* military intervention (see more on this below). This, Hamad convincingly argues in a recent Facebook post, is a betrayal of socialism’s principles of solidarity with the struggles

and uprisings of oppressed people worldwide:

The conservative left co-opt the language of struggle – their self-delusion is based on these ideas that they are almost a chosen people [and that] their struggle is the struggle. This births a socialism of the privileged. And like all privileged classes they do have an international conscience that has replaced the active radical idea of ‘internationalism’, but... they can’t envision a world that exists beyond a non-existent dichotomy of ‘good and evil’. Yet all of this is done in comfort and privilege – necessarily so.  
(from Facebook)

I also want to explain the words “reactionary” and “undialectical” which I use above. “Reactionary” is used not in the sense of extreme right-wing, but simply the kind of “knee-jerk, whatever they’re for I’m against it” opposition described in Cleek’s Law above. For example, the best argument made to retain the current “Union Jack” New Zealand flag – with all its history of colonial dispossession and

oppression – by conservative leftists is that the conservative-neoliberal government of John Key wants a flag change.

Meanwhile, *dialectics* is a form of logic which Karl Marx developed from the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. The essence of dialectics is that “things” (whether ideas, living creatures or physical objects) change and develop because of their internal contradictions, and from interactions with their opposites. To say that something is “undialectical” means that it is one-sided; that it sees the world in “black-and-white”, “good and evil” terms, as Hamad notes above.

Finally, to make it clear what we’re talking about here, I am using the term “neoliberalism” in the following sense: the globally dominant current “articulation” of capitalism, based on globalization, financialisation, and privatisation. Despite rhetoric of shrinking the State, in fact the State plays a crucial role in neoliberalism – not just in the negative sense of privatising its assets and lowering

barriers to globalisation and financialisation, but in actively introducing market relationships to every sector of society, smashing the resistance of workers, expropriating and enclosing the “commons” for capitalist profit, and attempting to co-opt the struggles of oppressed groups by allowing their leaders to rise in the neoliberal corporate and state hierarchies.

## A history of defeats

The struggle against neoliberalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand has been going on for longer than many of the protestors on the recent TPPA marches have been alive. Generally, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, our side has had few lasting victories, meaning a generation has grown up since 1984 knowing only the neoliberal, globalized, financialised capitalist economy.

In New Zealand, neoliberalism was instituted by a Labour Government elected in 1984. It was able to get away with breathtakingly fast liberalisation of a



previously highly protectionist capitalist economy partly because it co-opted many of the social movements which had come out of 1968-1981. The same Labour Government which smashed all foreign-exchange and capital controls and went on a privatisation spree also decriminalised male homosexuality, established the Waitangi Tribunal to address historical Māori grievances, and made many gestures in favour of (liberal) feminist causes.

For those university-educated women, queers and Māori who were lucky to have the skills that the new globalised/financialised economy needed, neoliberal reform was a clear improvement. Others, of course, were not so fortunate; but the result was the effective co-option of many of the mass movements which had arisen under the previous socially conservative but traditionally Keynesian government. Coming at the same time that “identity politics” (feminist, queer, ethnic/indigenous) were gaining a foothold on the global Left, at the expense of traditional forms

of Marxism which saw society in terms of strictly economic class struggle, this was an extremely effective way to implement neo-liberalism.

This may go some way to explain the *missing generation* phenomenon on the New Zealand left. A generation of left-wing activists (socialist, feminist, union, queer, green, Māori sovereignty) came out of the global ferment of the 1968 era, and cut their teeth in the mass protests against the 1981 South African rugby tour. The more recent (“millennial”) generation of activists (the current author included), on the other hand, had their consciousness sparked by the anti-capitalist movement around the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999, and later, 9/11, the war on terror, and the Iraq invasion, and the “Occupy” movements from 2011 onwards.

There is very little in between; very few radical activists who evolved in the 1984-1999 period. On one hand, those who came to consciousness through those years had experience in the various dissident parliamentary

parties (the NewLabour Party, the Greens, the Alliance), fighting an increasingly desperate rear-guard action against the inexorable neo-liberal reforms instituted by both Labour and conservative governments. (NLP and Alliance leader Jim Anderton could almost be the ideal type of a “conservative leftist”).

Meanwhile, those socialist groups which survived during the 1980s and the 1990s did so mainly by “bunkering down” – by adopting a routine of reaffirming the political lessons of the 1960s and 1970s, and waiting for “better days”. Those who saw feminism, queer theory or Māori sovereignty with suspicion tended to cling to their traditional ideas, thus sidelining themselves from the new movements; while those (mainly from the Maoist tradition) who had taken such ideas on board were gravitationally pulled towards reformist politics, NGO-style activism, the academy, or other such accommodations with the new neoliberal reality.

The net result is that overwhelmingly, the current activist

movement is led (mainly by default) by older activists, whose views of the world were formed before neoliberal globalization; who often have a place on the property ladder and thus a stake in the status quo, and who tend to be uncomfortable with the new social arrangements and points of struggle thrown up by the neoliberal era.

### Yesterday's solutions

Whatever the precise causes, the overall result is that *new anti-capitalist ideas and perspectives of how to transcend neo-liberalism, rather than roll it back, have not emerged* in Aotearoa/New Zealand activist circles; or, at least, have not been seriously taken up by the movements. To put it in crude terms, the activist Left in the neoliberal era has not attempted to intellectually grapple with the new possibilities thrown up by globalization.

Instead, past a general opposition to continued neoliberal reforms, the activist Left has held by default to a position of trying



to “put the toothpaste back in the tube” – that is to return to pre-neoliberal political and social structures. This has sabotaged the movement’s ability to deal with the new social forces created by neoliberal globalisation. Even worse – as I will explain below – it renders the movements incapable of effectively fighting *right-wing* anti-neoliberal forces – including xenophobia, conspiracy theory, and actual fascism.

Conservative leftism, then, essentially consists in trying to apply yesterday’s solutions to today’s problems. For example, Sam Charles Hamad convincingly argues that the lack of global solidarity for Syria is due to a kind of “inertia” in the anti-war movement. He argues that the British Left have mainly, mechanically applied the slogans and ideas of the movement against the Iraq War (an imperialist intervention from outside against an inconvenient local dictator) to the Syrian civil war (an active uprising against a dictatorship, with imperialists firstly trying to play both sides,

but more recently intervening to *support* the dictatorship).

Crucially, the Iraq war was the last time that many of the British socialist left were relevant in mainstream politics. There is an aspect of “reliving one’s glory days” here – which can occasionally also be seen on the New Zealand left with reference to the “Springbok tour” era.

In contrast, my argument is the left should seek to *build on* the new social forces and ways of living that neoliberal globalisation has thrown up, to create a post-neoliberal, post-capitalist future. I am arguing, in other words, that Marx’s insight that capitalism creates its own gravediggers is still correct; but that the 21st century revolutionary classes will not look like those of the 1840s or even the 1980s.

### Aspects of conservative leftism in Aotearoa/NZ

The following are the aspects of conservative-leftist thought which I find the most worrying on the current Aotearoa/NZ activist

scene. The first is **nationalism and campism**.

I explained the concept of “campism” in a previous article<sup>1</sup> in this way:

the metaphor that the world is divided into several military “camps”, with the largest being the Western camp led by the United States. Therefore, any government which disagrees with American foreign policy – no matter how oppressive to its own people, or however wedded to neoliberal market economics – can be supported. These governments are even called “anti-imperialist” – as if there were only one imperialism, that of the Western bloc.

This is of course part of what Sam Charles Hamad is describing when he talks about British socialists who have come to believe that the strength of the US/UK bloc is the main force for evil in the world. This is giving up the Marxist idea of imperialism as something inherent to capitalist expansion and bad on whichever side it appears, in favour of the “multipolar world” concept where

nationalism and imperialist intervention are okay, even supported, when they’re on “the other side”.

Again, this partly stems from a sort of intellectual laziness on the Left during the Iraq War era. Many Leftists found support in that anti-war struggle from those bourgeois thinkers called “International Relations Realists”, who believed the best way to preserve the global capitalist order was to preserve a “balance of power” and consensus between the various big powers. High-powered thinkers like Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer opposed Bush and Blair’s imperial adventures in the Middle East and support for Israel, not out of solidarity with the people of Iraq, Palestine or Iran, but for fear that this would unbalance the whole global capitalist order. Now, the “Realists” are definitively in favour of the Arab world’s dictatorships – Syria, Egypt, Jordan – and against the uprisings known as the Arab Spring. Nothing is more destabilising than a revolution, after all. And conservative leftists, having

fallen out of the habit of creating their own class-based internationalist analysis, are following them.

Conservative-left nationalism was seen clearly in the recent TPPA demonstrations. Flying the current, Union Jack-embazoned New Zealand flag wasn't just defiance of John Key's flag change initiative; the same idea was expressed by other protest banners which depicted John Key as a puppet of Barack Obama or "Uncle Sam". In other words, the argument made by those protesters was that the problem with the TPPA was US domination of New Zealand, *rather than the domination of multinational capitalism over the peoples of the world, their democratic rights and their commons*.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of "left-wing nationalism" ignores that the New Zealand state is a deeply racist, colonial enterprise, which even at its most "benevolent" (during the 1935-1984 welfare state era) was based on the alienation of

natural resources from Māori and the forcible suppression of class struggle. The "No Pride in Prisons" campaign<sup>3</sup> – which struggles against uniformed cops and prison guards being allowed to march in the LGBT pride parades – gives a very good account of how racist the New Zealand state continues to be, even in the era of the Waitangi Tribunal.

Being a parliamentary regime, of course, the New Zealand state is susceptible to public pressure in a way that an American-based multinational is not. But a defence of *democracy* (even in its weak capitalist form) and a defence of New Zealand's natural resources from enclosure and extractivism has to be carried out *against* the New Zealand state, not just against foreign states or multinationals. Waving the flag of the State which expropriated Māori, forcibly suppresses strikes and joins in imperialist interventions in Afghanistan and elsewhere is a short-cut to popularity which disarms us in the face of *right-wing* nationalism, like that

expressed by the NZ First party or fascists.

In the New Zealand context, with our large emphasis on agriculture, tourism and other rural-based activities, and our strong Green movement, **localism/parochialism** (only worrying about your own “patch”) has also become common sense on the conservative left. Localism is the obvious reactionary counter-position to globalisation; not only throwing up borders around “Fortress New Zealand” but supporting “local autonomy” wherever it arises. The idea is that small communities are more democratic, or even more “natural”, than big cities or the global civilisation which capitalism continues to (destructively and inefficiently) bring into existence.

Thus, conservative leftists opposed the amalgamation of Auckland’s various feuding local bodies into a single “Super City”, on general principle. But in practice, the Super City has been a net positive. The working-class masses of South and Western Auckland overrode the central and North

Shore privileged classes to elect a centre-left Mayor and Council, who – while far from consistently pro-worker – have prioritised public transport and urban amenities, and begun to make tentative moves against the endless, unsustainable suburban sprawl enabled by motorway madness. There is nothing left wing about – for example – fighting for the right of privileged enclaves like Devonport or Howick to reject public transport and affordable housing.

Curiously – given that even most conservative leftists accept the Green case against suburban sprawl – there is also a real **anti-urban** sentiment. A speaker at a recent MANA Movement AGM actively encouraged Māori to abandon the cities and build eco-villages on their ancestral lands – strangely coincident with the recent interest shown by our conservative Government in “resetting” the Pasifika communities of South Auckland in small South Island towns<sup>4</sup>. Veteran activist John Minto, when I interviewed him for this magazine in 2013<sup>5</sup>,

came out in principle against high-density housing (apartments, townhouses) in favour of traditionally-structured suburbs such as Glen Innes.

But as I've previously argued in this magazine<sup>6</sup>, high-density housing is much more environmentally sustainable than single-dwelling based suburbs, which are reliant on fossil-fuel burning car transport and encroach on productive farm land. This is an issue which has simply not been taken up to date by the activist Left in Aotearoa/New Zealand, who are happy – for example – to fight for the rights of the far-flung working-class suburbs of South Auckland or outer Wellington, but do not question whether they are even sustainable under conditions of climate change and resource crunch.

Crucially, anti-urbanism is a dead-end because it neglects the new constituency of precarious urban white-collar workers thrown up by neoliberalism<sup>7</sup>. The radical-urban-planning blog *Transportblog*<sup>8</sup> has gone into a lot of detail about the economic

benefits of “agglomeration”, and shown research that young people increasingly do not own cars and appreciate the benefits of high-density living and good quality public transport.

By promoting traditional suburban, provincial and rural life and reacting with suspicion to urbanisation and centralisation, the conservative left simply cuts itself off from this growing, economically important constituency, if they even notice that it exists. It should also be noted that historically, ethnic and sexual minorities have not fared well in small towns or rural areas.

Even worse, nationalism and localism under stress often reveal themselves in **xenophobia and racism**. Much of the anti-urban (in particular, anti-Auckland) rhetoric common among the activist Green and Left movements boils down to insecurity about immigration. A cry often heard from those trying to call for a halt to immigration (or at least the forcible re-directing of immigrants from New Zealand's only real global city, Auckland) is

that “we don’t want Auckland to become Shanghai”. Anyone who’s actually been to Shanghai might ask: why not?

One example of conservative-leftist attempts to leverage “Yellow Peril” xenophobia was Labour Party Auckland affairs spokesman Phil Twyford trying to blame the Auckland housing bubble on investors who happened to have Chinese names<sup>9</sup>. Of course, this something we’ve seen in neo-liberal economies worldwide – a deliberate decision to let house prices inflate to compensate for stagnant wages, enabling a massive consumption boom among the property-owning classes. It wasn’t Chinese investors who, for example, made the US or Irish property markets crash and burn in 2007/08. But several activist Leftists – especially in the MANA Movement – backed Twyford up.

The most disturbing example of conservative-leftist resistance to capitalist globalisation turning into racism has been recent outbursts of **anti-Semitism** in the movement. Distressingly, John

Key’s Jewish ancestry combined with his previous career as a merchant banker has been increasingly raised as an issue in activist Leftist circles. But this ties in with the second major facet of conservative leftism – conspiracy theory, since almost all conspiracy theories began as “International Jew” theories, before the outcome of World War II made explicit anti-semitism unfashionable.

Asher Goldman has defined conspiracy theory as “a theory based in supposition, one that flies in the face of evidence or science, often one that claims its correctness can be shown by the paucity of evidence in favour of it”<sup>10</sup>. To put it another way, conspiracy theory seems like it *should* be true, since it confirms broad cultural narratives. Closely related to conspiracy theory is “legal woo” – crank theories with no basis in reality such as “Freeman on the Land”<sup>11</sup>, or beliefs that removing the Union Jack from the New Zealand flag will somehow magically abolish Te Tiriti o Waitangi or even the authority of the New Zealand Government altogether<sup>12</sup>.

However, conspiracy theory is a subset of a more fundamental problem on the conservative left – **anti-intellectualism**, or even outright **anti-science**. As a reaction to decades of neoliberal or corporate-funded academics justifying more attacks on the poor, some of those who fight capitalism and oppression have begun rejecting the idea of “expert opinion” altogether. Radical Left discussion forums in Aotearoa/ New Zealand resound with not only political conspiracy theories, but theories that deny the physical sciences, such as anti-vaccination or anti-flouridation rhetoric. Some even join with the Right in denying climate change.

Recently, when I made some arguments based on *Transport-blog’s* analysis of Auckland’s need for the City Rail Link, another Marxist dismissively replied that he trusted what “ordinary people” were telling him rather than any putative experts – in this case, that resources should be poured into more buses (to get caught up in traffic?), rather than into

the “missing link” in Auckland’s transport infrastructure.

Conspiracy theory and other anti-intellectualism offers a way of understanding the world based on folk wisdom or “common sense”. Sixties radical hippies used to say that “common sense is what tells you the earth is flat.” The Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci made a more subtle decision between “common sense” (what workers and the oppressed absorb from ruling-class ideology) and “good sense” (what they learn from the factual conditions of their existence). For radicals to trust “the wisdom of the people” over expert opinion as a default is to fly in the face of this fundamental insight. There is no guarantee that “common sense” or “what the people are saying” under capitalism will be *right* about anything. The existence of racism among the working class is only the most obvious example of that. It is the job of revolutionaries to *challenge* the prejudices of “common sense” – using the insights of science – and to *build on* the insights of “good sense”.



The manifestations of anti-intellectualism on the conservative Left may also include dogmatic versions of Marxism. One strand of opinion involves **opposition to “identity politics”**, which – under the guise of a Marxist assertion of the class struggle as the motive force of history – instead makes its appeal to an idealised version of the working class which, by excluding gender, sexual and ethnic issues, makes the cisgendered-heterosexual-white male worker with no particular attachment to *tikanga* Maori the “norm”.

British socialist Richard Seymour has often pointed out that identity struggles are deeply implicated in class struggle, rather than separate from it. For example:

The tendency of capitalism is to multiply the number of lines of antagonism. And if certain identities are goaded into being, or take on a politicised edge, because the system is attacking people then it is clear that ‘identity politics’ is not a distraction, or an optional bonus. The fact is that ‘identities’ have

a material basis in the processes of capitalism. And just because they are constructed (from that material basis) doesn’t mean that they are simply voluntary responses to the life situation they arise in, which can be modified or dropped at will. Thus, it is not realistic to tell people – “you have the wrong identity; you should think of yourself as a worker instead”.<sup>13</sup>

The fact remains that – while strikes and other traditional forms of workers’ struggle are at an all-time low – uprisings “from below” are not only continuing, but becoming more intense, under the guise of “identity politics”. In New Zealand, apart from the ongoing Tino Rangatira struggle, we’ve seen a revived feminist movement push back against rape culture and police connivance in it. Meanwhile, “No Pride In Prisons” bring issues of race, sexuality and gender to the fore against the New Zealand capitalist state. Both these struggle put the role of the capitalist state into sharp focus. Meanwhile, conservative leftism ignores actual uprisings

and protests which don't fit into traditional categories.

### **A left disarmed**

In summary, this article has identified three major elements of conservative leftism in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which blend into each other:

Opposition to globalisation which has taken the forms of nationalism, localism and parochialism, leading to xenophobia and even forms of racism;

Opposition to the social changes induced by neoliberalism, in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context shading into anti-urbanism, suburbanism, ruralism and otherwise clinging to traditional ways of living and working;

Opposition to "expert opinion" as justifying neoliberal globalisation, which manifests itself as anti-intellectualism, rejection of science, conspiracy theory and other dogmatic beliefs.

This is in addition to a "campist" sympathy for non-US/UK forms of imperialism, which could

arguably be seen as a displaced form of nationalism. As I have tried to argue, this is an essentially backwards-looking political worldview, which seeks to return to earlier, simpler, more nationally-contained forms of capitalist or traditional society. It has nothing to say to new class forces, new ways of living or new identities which have been thrown up by neoliberal changes, but which cannot attain their full development under neoliberalism.

For example, a precarious freelancer, working from home, who enjoys their control over their conditions of work but not the uncertainty of their livelihood, is not going to react well to a conservative leftist offering them the alternative of a 9-5 state sector office job. A radical response, on the other hand, would be to explore ways in which flexible or freelance work (which might involve cross-border clientele) could be made less precarious and stressful – perhaps through a Universal Basic Income, or by expanding the "commons" of goods and services which are

available outside the market economy

So conservative leftism will increasingly be left behind, as new forms of living, working and identifying under neoliberalism evolve. However, an even worse danger is that *conservative leftism has no way of defending against fascist or "red-brown" ideas.*

"Red-brown" politics (also known as Third Position or Strasserism) is basically fascism with a social-justice veneer. Whereas an out-and-out fascist will talk in terms of "race" or "honour", a "red-brown" will talk about social justice and the evils of multinational capitalism – but will cunningly offer xenophobic or racist solutions: strengthening national borders, supporting "Kiwi bosses", aggressively rejecting refugees and immigrants, or persecuting "foreign" cultures or religions such as Islam. Red-brown politics, like fascism, also tends to reject logic and science, promoting traditional/pre-capitalist ways of living and working, including traditional gender roles and sometimes

"back-to-the-land" rejection of technology. Red-brown politics is therefore nationalist/localist, traditionalist/backwards-looking and anti-intellectual. These are *precisely the elements we have identified as being essential to conservative leftism in Aotearoa/New Zealand.*

We do not argue that conservative leftism is the same as "red-brown" politics. What we argue is that *it offers no intellectual defence against it.* The argument is that "red-brown" politics (and its cousin, outright fascism) have increasingly gotten a foothold in activist movements worldwide precisely because conservative leftism has no way of arguing against it. For example, conservative leftists in Aotearoa/New Zealand happily publish memes originating from far-right factions in the United States or Britain, because they have no way to tell the difference between radical and reactionary anti-globalisation.

On the international scale, red-browns and conservative leftists join together in cheerleading the Russian bombing of Syria and the

strangling of its revolution in the name of “fighting Islamist terror”, and the belief that Russian bombs are somehow better than American bombs. Similarly, conservative leftist Islamophobia (including, sadly, the Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt) supported General al-Sisi’s military coup against the democratically elected Islamist-backed Morsi government in Egypt in 2012.

### For a new radical leftism

So what is the alternative? The late British Marxist Tony Cliff explained the ideas of “opportunism” and “sectarianism” like this.

Say you’re on a picket line, waiting for the cops to come. The worker next to you starts making racist comments about immigrants taking our jobs. The sectarian response is: you walk off the picket line, refusing to have solidarity with a racist. The opportunist response is: you pretend you don’t hear, you just change the subject. Whereas Cliff argued that the correct revolutionary response is: you argue with the racist ideas,

firmly, telling the worker expressing them that immigrants are welcome and those ideas will bring down the movement. But, when the police comes, you link arms against them with *everyone* on the picket line.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand activist circles at the moment, my contention is that *the organised Marxist left has increasingly taken an opportunist approach to conservative leftism*. Even for those of us who do not agree with nationalism and xenophobia, back-to-the-land/anti-urban ideas, anti-science or conspiracy theory, there has not been enough effort to *confront* these ideas. Senior members of the MANA movement, for example, have refused to deal with anti-Semitic hatred posted on their Facebook pages, even when this was pointed out to them.

The logic is clear – of wanting to build a broad movement, of not wanting to be cut off from the movement. Conservative leftism is not a terrible disease, like fascism or even red-brown politics. It’s not something we

have to separate ourselves from. But it is something we have to *fight, intellectually and politically, within the movements*. Otherwise the movements are doomed to irrelevance, shrinking, and increasingly becoming infected by actual fascism.

What I am calling for in this article is for *radical* leftists to make a commitment to the struggle for a new understanding of the possibilities for revolution and uprisings in 21st century globalised neoliberal capitalism. This not only means supporting radical left-wing websites, journals, think-tanks and groups which are attempting to create new ways forward rather than to use yesterday's solution. It means *struggle within the movement*.

It means – regardless of what we think of John Key's flag-change push – that a movement for real democracy and against the TPPA and other neoliberal international agreements can't be built by an appeal to the Kiwi colonial state and the Union Jack which stands for it. It means arguing hard that anti-Semitism cannot be

tolerated, is not justified by the crimes of the apartheid State of Israel, and that global capitalism is *not* run solely for the benefit of the Rothschild family.

It means understanding that young workers not only have increasingly diverse gender/sexual identities which must be respected, but that they have decreasing interest in the suburban 9-5 working-class lifestyle of the 1960s – which wasn't that great anyway for women or other oppressed groups. It means *supporting* urbanisation, the growth of multicultural cities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, while fighting hard for them to be built on sustainable, high-density principles, and demanding Māori be granted tino rangatiratanga over natural resources.

It means quickly refuting Internet memes which promote anti-science ideas such as vaccination denial or global warming denial, or crank monetary theories about fractional reserve banking. Finally, it means separating political criticism from personal attacks – to rediscover the fact that we can fight each others' ideas without

driving each other out of the movement. This may be increasingly hard, as conservative leftists tend to react aggressively and personally to their ideas being challenged.

Conservative leftism is an ideology in the Marxist sense: a consolation and a way to explain the world which in fact makes it impossible to change it, because it does not look at the seeds that neoliberalism itself has planted which will undermine it one day. The point is not to expunge it from the movement, but to build an alternative to it and argue for that alternative.

## Notes

1. <https://fightback.org.nz/2015/11/05/against-campism-what-makes-some-leftists-support-putin/>
2. Note of course that I am *not* including the Tino Rangatiratanga struggle in the “nationalism” which I am critiquing. Māori sovereignty is qualitatively opposed to Union Jack-waving “Kiwi” nationalism, most obviously because the Union Jack flew over the dispossession of the tangata whenua and still stands for their subservience. The Tino Rangatiratanga flag stands for a popular resistance to imperialism which the New Zealand ensign never can. Strangely, some Tino activists wave the Union Jack flag as a symbol of Te Tiriti and denial of the sovereignty of the settler government – the opposite purpose for which Pākehā “Kiwi nationalists” wave it
3. <http://noprideinprisons.org.nz/>
4. [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11577072](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11577072)
5. <https://fightback.org.nz/2013/08/24/john-minto-for-mayor-we-need-a-kiwi-socialism/>
6. <https://fightback.org.nz/2015/02/13/urban-housing-is-an-ecosocialist-issue/>
7. See my previous article on this: <https://fightback.org.nz/2013/03/26/information-workers-workers-power-in-the-age-of-the-geek/>
8. <http://transportblog.co.nz>
9. <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/twyford-s-racist-cynical-chinese-property-buyer-statistics-de-bunked-q00964>
10. <https://libcom.org/library/against-conspiracy-theories-why-our-activism-must-be-based-reality>
11. [http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Freeman on the land](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Freeman_on_the_land)
12. See Ian Anderson’s article on this: <https://fightback.org.nz/2015/09/24/flag-debate-still-an-expensive-distraction/>
13. <http://www.leninology.co.uk/2011/11/cultural-materialism-and-identity.html>

# To the people

## a reply to “Against Conservative Leftism”

*by Ben Peterson. Originally posted on the ‘leftwin’ blog in February 2016.*

On February 4th upwards of 20,000 people descended on central Auckland to protest against the signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. Big sections of that crowd actively participated in blockades, shutting down the central city. It was an exciting and powerful display of popular power- as well as an active challenge to those wanting to drive radical change in Aotearoa. This massive exercise in popular power showed what is possible, the question facing radical leftists now is how can this energy be harnessed to bring forward a new generation of organisers?

However, not everyone sees it this way. In the aftermath of this rally, Fightback published an article by Daphne Lawless titled “Against Conservative Leftism”, which began with a decidedly pessimistic view of these rallies. The

article begins with the rally- but rather than being upbeat at the unprecedented protest – it polemicized *against* its participants. Supposedly, too many people carried the national flag. According to the article the question arising from the 4th is not of exciting possibilities, but a dangerous crossroads- and it goes on to argue against the threat of a “conservative leftism”.

### **Conservative Leftism – not a useful framework**

Lawless initially describes this “ideological” trend as the impulse of those who will automatically react against the neoliberal policies of government. Rather than leftists coming up with a proactive political platform of their own, they adopt a conservative leftism that is just “the



opposite of whatever neoliberals want.”

Reacting against the evils of neo-liberalism as it drives down wages and increases inequality is now apparently a problem. Supposedly, this reactive impulse at best leaves “conservative leftists” out of touch with the realities of workers today, and at worst develops into xenophobic nationalist tendencies. As Marxists a theory is judged by how it measures up against reality. This materialism is the basis of a Marxist political approach. While “Conservative leftism” is a thought provoking concept, it doesn’t measure up in reality as a coherent ideological perspective.

“Against Conservative Leftism” lists a range of examples of political positions that derive from its ideological perspective. These include but are not limited to opposition to local council amalgamations, opposition to intensive housing developments, legal crank such as ‘freemen’ theories, backing the Assad dictatorship, anti-semitism, homeownership and opposition to the NZ flag referendum.

This just doesn’t fit together. It doesn’t make sense to suggest that a person who opposes intensive housing developments is more likely to be an anti-semiter or conspiracy theorist. It doesn’t make sense to put leftist homeowners, and the not very often homeowners ‘freemen’ into the same ideological tendency just doesn’t make sense.

Concretely the article describes former Labour minister Jim Anderton as the ‘Ideal’ conservative leftist, but later also includes John Minto as a partisan of this politics. The two have and are actively pulling in different political directions— Anderton has made peace with the neoliberal labour party, Minto has been actively organising all his life—principally around internationalist issues.

For “Conservative Leftism” to be “ideology in the Marxist sense” as the article claims, there needs to be clear links and common positions among its partisans, and this just doesn’t exist.

It is undeniable that there is a lot of political confusion on the left and within the working class. There are many people grouping for a way forward, looking for a new way to take social struggle to a new level. This confusion means that a wide range of ideas are bubbling up in response to the reality of neoliberalism and experiences of occupy and the arab spring. While some of them are very interesting, and some of them are conspiratorial and insane. I do not suggest that this confusion isn't real, but it is not useful to try to tie all these ideas together into a coherent political position- this doesn't exist.

### **Why this is a problem**

"Against Conservative Leftism" lends itself to a dangerous political perspective. A Marxist understanding of politics has to have the participation of ordinary people at the center of its perspective. "Against Conservative Leftism" starts with the massive rally against the TPPA on the 4th of February, but rather than

seeing it as a positive that 20,000 largely working class people shut down the city, the participation of regular people becomes a problem that must be overcome.

Rather than being an exciting possibility for building a revolutionary politics, Lawless spends time warning that the participants of this movement could be latent fascists ("red-browns") that Marxists need to fight against.

For an effective left to exist- it needs to have greater confidence in working people that that.

Further, to win the debates within the TPPA, (against xenophobia etc), it is actually imperative that we involve more of these people in the movement. Within the TPPA movement there are ongoing and important strategic debates- specifically revolving around what strategy to beat the TPPA.

The liberal response seeks to convince the state and ruling class to change its mind on the trade deal by having the right arguments, and through moral pressure.

The radical response seeks to build power and confidence through working people to a point where it can challenge society.

The liberal response is suspicious of involving regular people- they can be unpredictable and not very photogenic, especially if they get angry and run riot. The liberal response accommodates to “local businesses” who they try to win over in the national interest.

The radical response seeks to build the participation of ordinary people into the movement- people who have less skin in the game of protecting the powers that be.

This is not to say that we don’t argue against bad ideas- but when someone comes to a rally for the first time and they bring with them a whole bag of ideological baggage- it is a good problem for the left to have, and it is those people who are the basis for pushing the politics of a movement in a healthier direction.

## An alternative

If Marxists want to build a strong, internationalist, anti-racist

movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand- we need to have a strong, broad and confident movement. This means aiming our political interventions in the direction of taking movements forward, not lecturing from the sidelines.

The one concrete suggestion that “Against Conservative Leftism” makes is that Marxists should be; “...quickly refuting Internet memes which promote anti-science ideas such as vaccination denial or global warming denial, or crank monetary theories about fractional reserve banking.” Arguing against wingnuts on Facebook is worse than useless. Arguing against conspiracy nuts on the internet will not convince anyone, and wastes your time.

Instead, building and organising, and participating in real debates in existing movements can ground debates and build confidence in new organisers. And those new organisers are the ones that we need to work with to build a new, confident radical politics.

# The opportunity for politics

## A reply to Ben Peterson

*By Ani White, Fightback Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington*

I'd like to thank Ben Peterson for responding to Daphne Lawless' recent article *Against Conservative Leftism*, published by Fightback, with his own piece. While we may disagree on some points, I am glad he has taken us up on this debate.

First I'd like to clear up a possible misconception about Daphne's article. The article was planned *before* the TPPA rallies on the 4th of February, and was not intended mainly as a commentary on the TPPA campaign. On the day after the TPPA rallies, Fightback published a piece by NZNO President Grant Brookes, explaining the health impacts of the TPPA. We are opposed to the TPPA and have supported rallies across the country.

Daphne's article on *Conservative Leftism* was published

over a week after the February TPPA rallies. This article was originally proposed as part of Fightback's magazine issue on neoliberalism, and takes a wider view than simply assessing the TPPA campaign. Daphne's thesis is that those leftists who simply react *against* neoliberalism, without developing a positive program to transcend it, end up in a funk of 'conservative leftism.'

However, as the TPPA campaign is currently the vehicle for much anti-neoliberal sentiment, I will focus on Ben's argument concerning the February 4th mobilisation:

A Marxist understanding of politics has to have the participation of ordinary people at the center of its perspective. "Against Conservative Leftism" starts with the massive rally against the TPPA on the 4th of February, but rather than seeing it as a positive that

20,000 largely working class people shut down the city, the participation of regular people becomes a problem that must be overcome.

Ben contends that popular participation must be the centre, and the start of analysis. Socialist analysis could start from many useful places in responding to the TPPA: the neoliberal assault of the past thirty years, the history of international 'free trade' agreements, the history of colonisation in the Pacific, the class dynamics within and between nations, the role of NZ imperialism, or indeed the role of popular resistance.

Clearly popular participation must be central. My contention is that popular participation is *necessary but insufficient* for radical politics, or for any kind of politics. Many political projects encourage popular participation, for various ends – voter drives for liberal candidates, the mass rallies of fascism and Stalinism – even the neoliberal mass media age encourages a certain 'wisdom of the crowd,' with flash mobs and real-time twitter commentary

paying testament to democracy, as inequality grows. Popular participation is only the beginning of the story. Politics must be primary.

The problems Daphne identified were not problems of popular participation, but problems of political leadership. After a thirty year period of working-class defeat, left organisers tend to take defensive, reactive positions – at best a militant negation of neoliberalism without a positive programme, at worst a form of nostalgia that panders to racist nationalism.

A section of the left has recently taken to defending the current flag, with its history of colonial violence. Whereas I consider the flag campaign a dangerous diversion, it's certainly possible to mount a principled case against the TPPA. As Ben has argued in the past:

John Key is not the puppet of a shadowy new world order based in the US – he represents the very visible rich and powerful at home. This rich and powerful class is happy to sell out ordinary kiwis, if it means

they can make more money overseas...

For the wealthy farmers in NZ, the prize in the TPPA would be the ability to undercut the dairy industry in North America, which could destroy many farming communities there. The NZ dairy mafia in Fonterra have no right to get rich at the expense of farming communities abroad (in the same way they don't have the right to do it at the expense of the environment at home). These farming communities across the waves in the Americas can be friends and allies in fighting this trade deal – but only if TPPA opponents are focused on the TPPA as a whole and not caught behind the 'national interests'.

Opponents of the TPPA will only be able to work together with these allies if we keep our focus on the trade deals for the rich. In each of the 12 nations involved in the TPPA negotiations there will be winners. It might be mining magnates from Australia, or manufacturers in South Korea. But in each country, working people will lose.

Many opposing the TPPA are exactly the forces who must be stitched together if we hope to achieve meaningful social justice; unionists, meat workers, nurses, teachers, students, precarious urban workers, and those dispossessed by structural underemployment. However, these forces must be united on a principled basis, preferably on a positive programme to transcend neo-liberal capitalism, rather than a defence of the supportable parts of the status quo. As Ben implies, opposition to the TPPA unfortunately hides behind 'national interests', which is at best misleading (fostering illusions in local ownership) and at worst actively dangerous (fostering racism).

Unfortunately, as Ben well knows, a minority from ultra-nationalist group Right Wing Resistance attend and promote anti-TPPA rallies. This is the sort of group that blames Jews, homosexuals and Marxists for the degeneration of the white nation – the bizarre, ugly sharp edge of nationalism. A comment on Ben's post about this

topic in December 2015 offers a liberal take on fascist involvement:

Some members of the Right Wing Resistance may have been proud to support some of the anti-TPPA marches, but we have no way of censoring thousands of people's personal ideologies that turn up to any of our marches. And frankly, the focus is anti-TPPA, not other agenda.

This is a very common response to neo-nazis in Aotearoa/NZ, and as I know Ben agrees, thoroughly inadequate. By including the ideological heirs of the Third Reich at an event, we *de facto* exclude Jewish people, queers, and other oppressed people. There is no way of including everyone; we seek rather to unite the oppressed, exploited and their allies; ultimately the majority of Aotearoa/NZ.

Banning fascists from left-wing events should not be controversial, and is not mutually exclusive with mass politics. Banning neo-nazis is an ordinary part of mass actions in Germany and other parts of

Europe, for obvious historical reasons. The problem of broad movements tolerating fascists can no longer be reduced to the occasional 'call-out' or squabble at the fringes, by individuals deemed haters and wreckers. We need to institutionalise a principled anti-fascist policy. Marshalls at events, or safer spaces contacts, could ensure this is a collective responsibility rather than being left to individuals.

Previously, I have argued that fascism is marginal in Aotearoa/New Zealand: with this country relatively sheltered from the global financial crisis, no significant ruling-class support for fascist movements, and no discernible growth of the formal neo-nazi groups since their peak in 2004, it appeared to me that this problem was overstated by sections of the far left. However, while formal fascism is marginal, it is hard to deny that xenophobia is a more common reaction to the protracted crisis than left internationalism. And xenophobia is one of the central elements



### 30      What Is Conservative Leftism?

Daphne identified of Conservative Leftism.

This is a mainstream enough problem to merit commentary by chart topping NZ hip-hop artist David Dallas:

They buying everything that  
ain't taxed

Blame it on the Chinese

Say it's foreign buyers

But if a Brit buys up

You don't bat an eyelid

Fuckin' wilin'

Could be third-generation  
migrants

But we out here ticking up on  
last names

What's next? Gonna check  
what shape their eyes is?

To tell the truth it probably  
wouldn't be surprising

Seem to have an issue with  
what the country comprises

Xenophobes on the rise and

I don't rate that shit

Whether or not fascism is a meaningful risk (that argument

could quickly degenerate into semantics), zero tolerance for xenophobia must be a bottom line.

Those with actual swastikas and white power tattoos remain thankfully a minority. Many, including ourselves, will have 'softer', unexamined forms of racism and nationalism ingrained. As Ben underlines, radicals do not emerge fully formed. Daphne argues for engagement rather than abstention – if comrades will forgive another lengthy quote:

The late British Marxist Tony Cliff explained the ideas of "opportunism" and "sectarianism" like this.

Say you're on a picket line, waiting for the cops to come. The worker next to you starts making racist comments about immigrants taking our jobs. The sectarian response is: you walk off the picket line, refusing to have solidarity with a racist. The opportunist response is: you pretend you don't hear, you just change the subject. Whereas Cliff argued that the correct revolutionary response is: you argue with the racist ideas, firmly, telling the

worker expressing them that immigrants are welcome and those ideas will bring down the movement. But, when the police comes, you link arms against them with everyone on the picket line.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand activist circles at the moment, my contention is that the organised Marxist left has increasingly taken an opportunist approach to conservative leftism. Even for those of us who do not agree with nationalism and xenophobia, back-to-the-land/anti-urban ideas, anti-science or conspiracy theory, there has not been enough effort to confront these ideas. Senior members of the MANA movement, for example, have refused to deal with anti-Semitic hatred posted on their Facebook pages, even when this was pointed out to them.

The logic is clear – of wanting to build a broad movement, of not wanting to be cut off from the movement. Conservative leftism is not a terrible disease, like fascism or even red-brown politics. It's not something we have to separate ourselves from. But it is something we have

to fight, intellectually and politically, within the movements.

Ben strongly implies that Daphne's argument stems from a distrust of working people. On the contrary, Fightback trusts precisely that people can be won to a principled internationalist position, rather than assuming that we need to pander to the worst elements of "common sense" (in Gramsci's sense of the term).

Although nationalism is central to this debate, conservative leftism does not consist solely of nationalism. Marxists also have to take a positive stand within the movement against anti-urbanist, back-to-the-land, conspiracy theory or anti-science ideas which are becoming popular in the movements. Conservative leftism is a kneejerk reaction to neoliberalism, falling on easy intellectual crutches, perpetuated when radicals pander rather than arguing for a clear alternative. In Daphne's words, "We do not argue that conservative leftism is the same as "red-brown" politics. What we argue is that *it offers no intellectual defence against it.*"

I agree with Ben that tens of thousands of people shutting down Auckland City, in response to a neoliberal trade deal, is an opportunity. However, our political project cannot begin and end with this moment of opportunity. As Jodi Dean phrases it in her recent book *Crowds and Party*:

The crowd does not [inherently] have a politics. It is the opportunity for politics.

If we do not sharpen our politics, both practically and theoretically, the opportunity will pass. Popular mobilisation is necessary but insufficient; intolerance of racism is necessary but insufficient; we must develop a clear internationalist programme, and organise on that basis. We must challenge each other and ourselves. I celebrate the militancy of February 4th, and criticise because I think we can do so much better.

# Trump, Brexit, Syria... and conservative leftism

by Daphne Lawless. Originally published on the Fightback blog in December 2016.

In the 10 months since I introduced the concept of “Conservative Leftism” to the NZ Left, only one argument has been raised against it that seemed to take the idea seriously and be worthy of taking seriously in return. This argument – which has been raised by more than one sincere socialist, at greatest length by Ben Peterson at [leftwin.org](http://leftwin.org) – is that Conservative Leftism is an “amalgam” which doesn’t really exist, that there is no necessary connection between the conservative strands of thought I identified in the contemporary activist movement.

Ben argued:

*While “Conservative leftism” is a thought provoking concept, it doesn’t measure up in reality as a coherent ideological perspective.*

“Against Conservative Leftism” lists a range of examples of political positions that derive

from its ideological perspective. These include but are not limited to opposition to local council amalgamations, opposition to intensive housing developments, legal crank such as ‘freemen’ theories, backing the Assad dictatorship, anti-Semitism, homeownership and opposition to the NZ flag referendum.

This just doesn’t fit together. It doesn’t make sense to suggest that a person who opposes intensive housing developments is more likely to be an anti-Semite or conspiracy theorist. It doesn’t make sense to put leftist homeowners, and the not very often homeowners ‘freemen’ into the same ideological tendency just doesn’t make sense.

One way of responding to Ben’s argument using Marxist jargon would be to say: “there *is* a contradiction, but the contradiction is in reality.” I strongly believe that

the evidence has in fact become clearer over the course of 2016, that the strands of reactionary opinion among self-identified “Leftists” that I have identified *do, in actual reality, go together as a set of propositions which support each other*, if not necessarily logically “coherent”.

For the record, I identified three conservative reactions on the self-identified “Left” to neoliberal globalisation:

- opposition to globalisation in and of itself (nationalism, xenophobia, obsession with “sovereignty”, one-sided opposition to Western imperialism in particular aka campism);
- opposition to the social changes which have happened in the neoliberal/globalised era (opposition to cosmopolitan urbanisation, anti-immigration, idealisation of “traditional” rural/small-town/working class life, scepticism of newer identities around gender/race which are smeared as “identity politics”);
- one-sidedly deep scepticism of neoliberal media/academic

narratives, reflected in an embrace of conspiracy theory, traditional “common sense” and health quackery.

We might use the following shorthands:

- **conservative anti-imperialism;**
- **conservative populism;**
- **anti-rationalism** (or perhaps “intellectual populism”).

The original article – and Ben’s response – was written before what a radical internationalist Left viewpoint would see as the massive catastrophes for people and planet of 2016: the Trump victory; the victory of British exit from the European Union (Brexit) which has led to an explosion of racist violence; the growing strides of neo-fascist movements across the world, from the French *Front National* to the online lynch-mobs known as the “alt-right”; and the ongoing genocidal destruction of Syria by its own government backed up by Russian imperialism.

It is my contention that this series of disasters has vindicated the Conservative Left idea, in that *New Zealand leftists who were expressing Conservative Left ideas at the beginning of the year have either welcomed these developments, or at least seen them as potentially positive developments.* To give a few examples from the New Zealand Left in particular:

- Mike Lee, the Auckland Council member on whom I focussed in my article on the Auckland local body elections<sup>1</sup> as the chief local promoter of conservative-left ideas, issued a Facebook message after the election which expressed thankfulness for the Trump victory, seemingly based on the idea (assiduously promoted by both Trumpist and Russian sources) that Hillary Clinton would start World War 3.
- Prominent veteran NZ leftist writer Chris Trotter – who was, indeed, one of our major models when we elaborated the idea – announced that “I proudly count myself” as a conservative

leftist. Most of this post either ignored the substance of my article, or was an apologia for the Russian-backed Syrian regime destruction of Aleppo, which can be quickly debunked by a quick flick through the resources on any Syrian Solidarity website or Facebook page.

- *Daily Blog* proprietor “Bomber” Bradbury, who previously promoted Mike Lee’s anti-intensification and anti-youth politics, has now come out with an explicit anti-immigration screed. He even characterizes pro-immigration policy as an “elite cosmopolitan” viewpoint – a snarl-phrase which could be taken directly from a Stalinist or fascist rant.
- Bradbury’s co-thinker on Auckland local body politics, perennial mayoral candidate Penny Bright, has been counter-protesting Syrian solidarity demonstrations supporting the Assad regime’s “sovereignty” (see image), and is reported to be sharing links on social media



*Auckland  
activist Penny  
Bright counter-  
demonstrates a Syria  
solidarity protest,  
October 2016. Photo:  
Daphne Lawless.*

from David Icke, doyen of “Lizard People” conspiracy theory.

From where I sit, this is convincing data. In general, the sections of the New Zealand left whom I had in mind as either “conservative leftist” or heavily influenced by that ideology have

been unanimous in – even if not outright supporting Assad/Putin, Trump and Brexit – arguing that these phenomena are not in fact that bad, that they can be seen as expressions of resistance to imperialism and neo-liberalism. This insight has been reproduced by British radical academic



Priyamvada Gopal, who said recently on Facebook:

This cleavage in left circles that has arisen over the last six months is a pretty neat and sharp one, with only a few zigzags and crossovers and that generally only around Brexit. How do we read it? On one side:

Anti-Assad / Anti-Putin /  
Anti-Massacres

Anti-Trump

Anti-Brexit

On the other side:

Assad Apologetics/Anti-Western  
Imperialism Only

Trump is No Worse than  
Hillary

Lexit

Priyamada's schema snugly fits two out of the three points of my schema. The Assadist "Left" are clearly conservative anti-imperialists, taking the "campist" position that the main leaders of opposition to neoliberal globalisation are the leaderships of various states, who range from authoritarian to totalitarian in their internal

regimes – thus excluding any role for mass action in changing the world, and indeed smearing the Arab Spring uprisings as CIA-sponsored attempted coups. Meanwhile, conservative-left reactions to the Trump debacle have ranged from welcoming it as a blow to neoliberal globalisation (ludicrous, given the identity of the various plutocrats whom Trump is naming to his cabinet), to the less wild-eyed interpretation that a "revolt of the white working class" defeated Hillary Clinton. This latter interpretation conveniently lends itself to calls for a more "traditional" left politics targeting "ordinary" (read: white, male) workers, and throwing not only the feminist movement but oppressed queer, ethnic and religious minority workers under the bus.

Meanwhile, the "Left Brexit" (Lexit) phenomenon showed a combination of both these tendencies. On one hand, it "white-washed" (we can use the term in full irony) the Brexit movement led by reactionary tabloids and the Trump-like UKIP, seeing it as

a working-class revolt rather than a reactionary populist uprising. On the other, it one-sidedly attacked the EU's neoliberal institutions, trying to put a "left" face on British nationalist isolationism, and ignoring the fact that freedom of movement for workers between EU countries is a vital progressive gain for migrant workers. The consequences of this position were that Lexiters had to argue away the rise in racist abuse and violence after the referendum, either as "exaggerated", something that was happening anyway, or even outright fabricated by the mainstream media<sup>2</sup>. This rhetorical move was a precursor to the breath-taking denials of reality we have become used to from supporters of the Putin/Assad axis in Syria.

The *Morning Star*, the daily newspaper traditionally associated with the Communist Party of Britain, has shamefully led the conservative-leftist charge on both these issues, both cheerleading the ongoing massacre in Aleppo as "liberation" and opposing freedom of

movement for workers. Some have taken this to mean that conservative leftism is really a reappearance of Stalinism – and certainly there are similarities to the old Western Communist backing of Russian tanks and Eastern Bloc nationalism. However, it is also vital to note that the leadership of the British Stop the War Coalition – who have shamefully refused to promote the cause of Free Syria – are dominated by people who came from the anti-Stalinist revolutionary tradition, mainly former leaders of the British Socialist Workers Party. If the problem was originally a Stalinist one, then the rot has spread.

Where then is the "third leg" of the tripod, anti-rationalism/intellectual populism? Whether someone on the conservative left believes in traditional conspiracy theories, health quackery or other kinds of crank thought or not, the common move in both conservative anti-imperialism and conservative populism is to reflexively reject "mainstream", "elite" or "establishment" viewpoints, and yet be willing to believe any

alternative promoted as “alternative”. This might – for example – lead from an accurate perception that capitalist banking helps increase the gap between rich and poor and makes capitalist crisis more intense, to an advocacy of a fantasy alternative based on a misunderstanding of the real problem such as Social Credit or Positive Money.

In particular, the use of the terms “elite” and “establishment” is a sign of intellectual surrender to Right-wing populism (see Bradbury, above). These are totally empty signifiers which the listener can apply to whichever bogey-group they think are really running things. While a sincere leftist might envision the capitalist oligarchy as “the elites”, a Right-populist will think of liberal academics or gay/female/ethnic minority professionals whom they blame for “keeping them down”; others will think of the “cultural Marxists”, the Elders of Zion, the Illuminati, or hostile UFOs.

Recent analyses have suggested that the intelligence services of the Russian Federation under

Vladimir Putin are engaged in actively promoting this kind of “radical scepticism”. They argue that Russian propaganda does not aim to promote its own narrative, but simply to undermine the consensus narratives of Western-aligned media and academia. By a staggering coincidence, this is also how conspiracy theories such as “9/11 Truth” also work – not by attempting to prove their own point of view, but by picking at threads in the “establishment” narrative, so as to imply that their own is equally valid. This strategy has also been used in the attempt by Christian fundamentalists to get anti-evolution pseudo-science taught in public schools.

Being prepared to dismiss out of hand any report appearing on the BBC website, yet unquestioningly forwarding videos from the RT website, is essentially little different from the health crank’s high-powered scepticism of “Big Pharma”, combined with a willingness to believe anything presented by alternative-medicine profiteers (what rationalists sometimes call “Big Placebo”). The argument here

is not a conspiracy theory that conservative leftism is some kind of Russian plot. The argument is merely that Russian intelligence has deftly exploited the growth of populist anti-elitism in Western countries to promote themselves as the good guys -in the same way that traditional Nazis have exploited the meme culture of 4chan and similar online forums to produce the “alt-right”.

It seems clearer as time goes on that these three strands of conservative anti-imperialism, conservative populism and anti-rationalism/intellectual populism go together, that holding one of these viewpoints is a very good predictor of holding the others. There is thus a clear cleavage between the Conservative Left which rejects globalisation per se and refuses to engage with the new social forces thrown up by it;

and the radical international Left which wants ANOTHER kind of globalisation, a workers’ and oppressed people’s globalisation. The latter sees the new proletarian forces and oppressed communities thrown up by existing globalisation as the vanguard agents of change, just as Karl Marx saw the industrial workers as the grave-diggers of capitalism, rather than wanting to send them back to the farms. I only wish I had a better word for this necessary alternative tendency than “radical internationalist Left”. Suggestions are welcomed.

## Note

1. <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/10/19/aucklands-no-choice-elections-blue-greens-and-conservative-leftists/>
2. Personal experience from Facebook discussions.

# On Conservative Leftism

a conversation between Daphne Lawless and Gregory W.

*Reprinted from the Communist Rupture blog*

**Gregory W.:** In the article, *Against Conservative Leftism*, you suggested that “21st century revolutionary classes will not look like those of the 1840s or even the 1980s,” and that “the left should seek to build on the new social forces and ways of living that neoliberal globalisation has thrown up, to create a post-neoliberal, post-capitalist future.”

This part of the article jumped out at me as being particularly important. It seems that the article is peppered with references to new or emerging revolutionary subjects. But I would like for you to elaborate on this point and maybe give some examples that are shaping your thinking.

**Daphne Lawless:** Right. During the changes of the last 40 years – the neoliberal/globalization era, or the “post-Fordist production” era, whatever you want to call

it – traditional working-class communities and institutions in the advanced capitalist countries have atrophied and dissolved. The social-democratic parties have become hollow shells and the labor unions have become increasingly “professionalized”, run along the same lines as NGOs by full-time organisers. *But:* if you still find the Marxian critique of political economy useful, this does not mean there is no more proletariat in the Western countries.

You have a disorganized proletariat of service workers, or what’s sometimes called “the precariat”; and then you have a more privileged layer of workers in technology-based industries. Neither of these are going to behave or see the world in the same way as a unionised auto worker of the 1950s. But by Marxist definition they are still proletarian, or in the process of being proletarianised.

And you can see emerging radical and reactionary tendencies in both of these groups.

To take the tech workers for example, the “open-source” communities were one prefiguration of how communist labor relations might work. Then you had the brief flowering of Anonymous as a “meme”, an idea, a method of organising among technological workers, which took off at more or less the same time as the Arab Spring, Occupy, etc. Of course after the defeat of those radical movements you had the swing to the reactionary sides of those movements – the neo-reactionaries, alt-right, 4chan /pol/ kind of thing.

But one hallmark of what I would call the “conservative left” is the assumption that the radical workers’ movements of the 21st century will look like those of the past. You have this tendency towards LARPing, to try to recreate forms from the past. It simply won’t work. New forms of capitalist exploitation and oppression require new forms of organisation, and a Left which

doesn’t keep up with the actual formations crystallising *right now* is an irrelevant circle-jerk.

**Gregory W.:** I find this whole aspect of your analysis very compelling.

I’m reminded of the speculative science question, “if we were confronted with alien life, would we recognize it when we see it?” It seems like there’s something similar going on when it comes to recognizing radical political breakthroughs because we’re expecting things to look a certain way.

There has been some promising stuff in the U.S. in recent years with service industry workers organizing and going on strike. That in itself is an example of working class movement, or even of a proletarian subset, which doesn’t fit the conventional mold. Still, it’s on a spectrum with labor struggles that we’re apt to recognize.

But there’s stuff that’s even more alien. We may rightly bemoan the fact that there hasn’t been a general strike in the U.S. in a long time (and it’s not even clear

what that indicates, given that France has them pretty often and yet things aren't going so well over there). But in 2016 we had a historic, nation-wide prison strike with solidarity actions in some prisons internationally. What does that mean?

The prison system is a huge part of the neoliberal economy in the U.S., arising with the war on drugs and the rollbacks on social guarantees. The vast majority of prisoners were workers in the outside world. In prison, many continue to do low-wage work and on top of that, they are generating value just by being housed, to the benefit of a whole web of corporate and state bureaucracies.

What does it mean that prisoners were able to coordinate such a strike? And you also have to think about the fact that most prisoners will eventually be released, and will likely be employed at low-wage jobs, and/or work in the informal economy. What does it mean if someone who was involved in a nation-wide prison strike now works at

Wal-Mart? What insights and skills could that person bring to organizing outside of prison? If I were developing a revolutionary cadre organization, I might want to recruit some of these people, or else connect up with them in some way – talk to them, work in a coalition with them, or whatever.

**Daphne Lawless:** Oh, certainly. Of course the prison-industrial complex in the US is reasonably unique, so I'm loathe to try to talk about it in any detail, but there are similarities in New Zealand – whereas 50% of the prison population in the US is African-American, so 50% of the prison population in NZ is Māori. But from what I gather prison labor is far more widely used in the US – though I don't know in what areas of the economy it is important. The paradox is the more important prison labor becomes, the more potentially powerful labor organising in prisons becomes.

I know that some people from the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist tradition have made organising among prisoners a top priority. I



don't know how close you are to that.

As to the service industry workers, yes, we've had great strides forward in this country in that. Basically, the UNITE union was founded by social-democratic political veterans who had been excluded from the neoliberalized Labour Party and their compliant trade-union apparatuses, and started with the goals of (a) rebuilding a base for social democracy; (b) bringing Seattle-era social-movement methods of organisation to unionism. They also scored a coup by recruiting organizers from young communist groups – people motivated from ideology will work harder and sometimes for less pay!

So by those means, UNITE have been effectively able to organise workers at many fast food chains, and other overlooked workers such as security guards, casino staff etc. However, the price for this is a certain institutionalisation, rapprochement with the older unions/Labour Party etc. And the problem with giving committed revolutionaries a “day job” doing

labour organising is that you risk turning into an NGO-model, where it becomes all about the young educated radicals (who by virtue of being union organisers are inherently middle-class from a Marxist point of view) as the protagonists rather than the low-paid precarious workers they're organising. (*See the Appendix of this article for a contrary point of view from Ben Peterson – Ed.*)

So to some degree, as long as the basic economic structure remain the same, it's “meet the new boss, same as the old boss” – attempts to *replace* the old reformist labor structures will lead to becoming *similar* structures. You can see this with what happened in Greece – the radical SYRIZA replaced the neoliberal PASOK, at the price of becoming neoliberal themselves. These are the limits of working for reforms within the system – you will get reforms and nothing but.

**Gregory W.:** First off, I am interested in learning more about organizers who are prioritizing things like prison work (also, immigration as a fault-line)...You

bring up a lot of good points. It is interesting to hear about the differences and similarities between New Zealand and the U.S. What you've said underscores my overall feeling that we are still in a very difficult period in terms of devising radical strategy, with so many of our previous verdicts turning up short. At the same time, masses of people are on the move and we need to be in the midst of it, learning from these developing struggles.

Earlier we talked about new and emerging revolutionary classes and how that relates to your analysis of conservative leftism. The basic idea is that capitalism is a dynamic system. It changes. The advanced neoliberal capitalism we face today—with global markets and no actually-existing socialist blocs—is very different from what movements faced over the course of the 20th century. As you said, a defining characteristic of the conservative left is to assume that today's radical working class struggles will look like those of the past. You suggest that this is

not an adequate orientation, and is in fact doomed to fail.

We discussed some examples of emerging forces that break with previous patterns. We discussed recent attempts to organize service industry workers in both New Zealand and the U.S., and how the dynamics of that differ from the organization of 20th C. industrial workers in the advanced capitalist countries (e.g., unionized auto workers). We also discussed the significance of prisoners organizing in the U.S., as the prison industrial complex is a key feature of contemporary U.S. capitalism, arguably having a much greater weight than it would have at any time in previous decades.

That being said, your critique of conservative leftism seems to cover multiple levels. I'm not sure how you would want to characterize the "level" I summarized. It has to do with our forces on the ground, radical organization, and the like.

Another level we might call geopolitics. Is that fair? You discuss

how the left orients itself to changing global configurations—for example, how the left positions itself in relation to the Syrian civil war. I personally find this whole piece of the analysis more difficult to grapple with. My hope is that you could provide a sketch here of some of the broad problems, tackling the question of why we are finding the current geopolitical situation so disorienting, and how we might position ourselves in a way that's forward-looking and effective.

**Daphne Lawless:** Right. I think what you're getting at is what I categorize as “campism”. This is when the Left replaces the class struggle with a geopolitical struggle as the centrepiece of its analysis – that the fight is between “good” and “bad” nation-states. There were historically two Left-wing versions of this: the Stalinist version where what was good for the USSR/Eastern Bloc was good for the workers of the world; and the Maoist version where what was good for China and its “non-aligned” allies was

best for the oppressed peoples of the world. The former had Leftists cheering as Soviet tanks went into Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan; the latter had Leftists supporting the rapprochement with Nixon, supporting counter-revolutionaries in Angola, the Shah of Iran, or even Khmer Rouge.

Simply put, it's a left-wing gloss on Nixon's apocryphal comment about Somoza – “he's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch”. I wrote about this in an article before the concept of conservative leftism coalesced – <https://fightback.org.nz/2015/11/05/against-campism-what-makes-some-leftists-support-putin/>

In the first Conservative Leftism article I mentioned “Cleek's Law” – that modern conservatism is simply the opposite of whatever liberals want. Given that, Conservative Leftism is simply the opposite of everything neoliberalism wants. Similarly, “campism” means reflex opposition to whatever one geopolitical “camp” wants. Up until the Trump era, for most of the Left, this of

course meant a simplistic attitude of “US imperialism bad, every target of US imperialism good”. That might be more difficult to intellectually justify that Trump is trying to build an alliance between US imperialism and its Russian counterpart, its historic opponent.

The high point of the current incarnation of the global Left was 2002-3; the opposition to Bush/Blair’s wars of conquest in Afghanistan and Iraq. Now, the thing was that this brought together several different strands of opinion on the same side. Liberals objected to an “illegal war” fought on a humanitarian pretext. Old-school socialists opposed US/UK imperialist power in general. Conservative “realists” objected to the “destabilisation” of the Middle East by removing the dictator Hussein. Conservative “isolationists” objected to the US getting involved in overseas interventions of any shape and form. Worst of all, fascists supported the “national sovereignty” of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and ranted about the evil Islamic hordes which

were being held back by his “secular” dictatorship.

The problem came when the Left – due to the poverty of its own analysis – started internalising Right-wing arguments (realist, isolationist or fascist) as its own. The isolationist or fascist arguments also coincided with the old Cold War campism which assumed that everything which the neoliberal global order was attacking must be a good thing. Soon after the Iraq debacle, the theory of “colour revolutions” started gathering adherents on the Left.

According to this, apparent democratic movements in countries which were being stubborn in the face of neoliberal global orders were actually puppets of the CIA, or possibly George Soros, seeking not freedom but to destroy national sovereignty and surrender to neoliberalism. This flattened out the difference between countries attempting a Left opposition to globalisation (Venezuela, Cuba) and shitty kleptocratic dictatorships – such as Zimbabwe, Turkmenistan,

or of course, most of the Arab countries.

This meant when the Arab Spring hit, much of the Left turned its back on democratic movements struggling against dictatorships on the streets as agents of neoliberalism and sided with their dictators – Qadhafi, Assad, recently al-Sisi. The logic ran: “neoliberalism doesn’t like this shitty dictator; therefore this shitty dictator must be supported; therefore the demonstrators are enemies of the people”. To this, in the Arab context in particular, was added a huge dollop of Islamophobia uncritically inhaled from the fascist-Right, the idea that secular dictators were preferable to democratic forces where men wore beards and might say Allahu Akbar occasionally. Here’s a message a comrade of mine sent recently:

“spent my saturday night fighting with a tanky for hours and holy shit i was trying to channel your good self, but to limited effect but the underlying theme was that US imperialism was wrong,

therefore anything they  
attack/undermine was right.  
fucking mad binary  
Gadaffi was a good guy  
super good guy  
even when shelling his citizens  
in the city he was a great guy,  
best guy”

Simply put, then: the campism which leads to apparent Leftists supporting Syria’s regime bombing and gassing its own people, and the horrible regimes of Iran and Russia giving it their full support, is the exact analogy of conservative leftism, in that it simply assumes that any shitty dictatorship which stands up against the neoliberal global order is to be supported – that is, it can no longer tell the difference between socialism and fascism. This uncritical embrace of nationalism is echoed in Europe by the fascist and conservative-Left alliance pushing for the breakup of the European Union.

It is fundamental to my analysis that – just like capitalism as a whole – neoliberalism is *contradictory*, that it has a progressive tendency as well as an oppressive

tendency, and that socialism for the 21st century will build on that progressive tendency (globalisation, the breakdown of the nuclear family, networked rather than hierarchical forms of power) rather than try to turn the clock back to the era of nation-state autarky. To do otherwise is opening the door to fascism.

So basically I want to revive that good old slogan of Third Camp revolutionaries: “Neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism”. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_camp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_camp))

**Gregory W.:** If we wanted to put this in a formal-theoretical way, we might say that class struggle and geopolitics are relatively independent of one another. There is a disjunction between the two, or a gap between two levels of activity (and therefore two levels of analysis). We have to be able to think through the ways that these two levels intersect and condition one another, but it can't be in an automatic or unchanging way.

And building on what you've said, I would also like to emphasize the importance of epochal shifts. One thing that's clear is that, after the Russian revolution and the consolidation of the Soviet state, the gravity of world revolution shifted to the anti-colonial struggle or movements for national liberation. There were all kinds of forces interacting in this context on multiple continents: socialists, communists, liberal modernizationists, kleptocratic opportunists, billions of people with countless hopes...everything from the Bandung forces to guerrilla insurgencies were caught up in this huge wave. Communist revolution tended to combine with this anti-colonial struggle. And within a couple decades, classical colonialism was defeated almost everywhere.

As you've pointed out (here and in the article on campism) there were shifting international alliances, the two main revolutionary poles being those of the USSR and China. Both countries absolutely did back revolutionary and progressive movements all

over the world – so there is a real basis for some of the strategy of this era – and both backed reactionary regimes and movements at different times. My concern would not be to go through every realpolitik decision that these regimes and movements made, saying yea or nay. I just want to emphasize that there was an epochal context for these decisions, and that the context is now over.

The 20th century form of anti-colonial struggle is over and both the Russian and Chinese revolutions have been defeated. It is odd to see some on the left discuss the foreign policy of these countries as if they were still socialist and backing world revolution.

I want to bring up the book, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, by the Chinese “new left” thinker, Wang Hui. In that book he discusses the post-Mao reform era in China, and how “the old socialist stance of internationalism gradually faded from the scene.” He says that, “there is nothing that

demonstrates this problem better than the 1999 NATO (American) bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia: in the extraordinary meeting of the United Nations discussing the bombing, not only did the Western alliance stand together, but the traditionally sympathetic Third World alliance was unwilling to voice support for China.” This was almost 20 years ago and the whole thing had already fallen apart.

**Daphne Lawless:** “the gravity of world revolution shifted to the anti-colonial struggle or movements for national liberation.” – well, you know, I might argue with that. You can say that was part of the process, in that there was a shift away from the struggle of the organised industrial working class in the advanced capitalist countries. BUT the advanced capitalist countries also saw an eruption of struggle from youth, women, oppressed ethnicities/races, and the queer communities. And that has had pretty earth-shattering effects, we have to admit.



Part of conservative leftism is running down these movements, suggesting that—for example—gay marriage, limited recognition of indigenous peoples, even women being allowed to get credit cards in their own name means nothing alongside the neoliberal demolition of traditional working-class organisation. But the hard thing to recognize is precisely that traditional working-class organisations were complicit in the oppressive features of the post-war social democratic consensus. Let's give all credit to the pro-Soviet CP in the US who were the only white people seriously pushing for desegregation in the 1930s. But the mainstream workers' movement (in NZ as in the US) was no more woman- or queer-friendly or less dominated by (unacknowledged) white supremacy until the social movements forced them in that direction from the 60s onwards.

I strongly argue that neoliberalism would have had a tougher time destroying the Western workers movements if they had worked WITH the social

movements, rather than against them, using the familiar “but muh white working class” rhetoric you still hear from conservative leftism today. That the neoliberals were smart enough to eventually co-opt indigenous, feminist, queer, even trans struggles just shows that they were smarter than the traditional workers movement, not that there was anything inherently neoliberal about those struggles. So we need a better mass workers movement today.

Anyway, back to the rest of what you were saying....!

**Gregory W.:** What you just said is a good argument against theoretical overstatement, which you see in the programs and agitational material of many groups (e.g., “U.S. imperialism is the main enemy in the world today”). We should be more careful.

I do agree with your analysis above. I definitely had in mind eruptions like the Algerian war, which are such a big part of the post WWII story. But it should also be borne in mind that sweeping radicalization in the

western countries happened at the same time. These are interrelated at every level. And I think it is wrong to say, for example, that the western '68 wasn't revolutionary. The things you mention are a big deal. And maybe that's even more apparent now than it has been in some time, precisely because so many gains are under attack. And we shouldn't allow ourselves to be blackmailed into a class vs. "identity politics" dead end.

**Daphne Lawless:** Hah, that particular overstatement leads you directly into supporting Assad, Putin, Mugabe, Qadhafi, Kim Jong-Un, any sleazy exploitative dictator.

Of course "identity politics" can't be separated from class politics.

What proportion of the working class are actually white, cis-het, male, able-bodied, speaking the dominant language, etc? Well less than 25%, I'd wager. Class struggle has to be intersectional or it's simply social-chauvinism.

"It is odd to see some on the left discuss the foreign policy of (Russia and China) as if they were still socialist and backing world revolution." – precisely. It's debilitating nostalgia, even LARPing (live action role-playing). The ability to analyse the world as it is has been replaced by a dogmatic adherence to categories from the past. This is how you build a religion or a sect, not how you build a global movement. One is reminded of the Byzantine Empire in its last days, whose poetry described the encroaching

Turks as “Persians”, referencing a war from 2000 years previously that the Greek-speakers won. It will never be 1917 or 1949 or even 1975 again. We need a new internationalism for the globalised era.

**Gregory W.:** Indeed and without that new internationalism, we get new Strasserism (*a militantly working class strand of Nazism – Ed.*). “Sad,” as Trump would say.

## Appendix: Comment from Ben Peterson of UNITE Union

This contains important falsehoods which I think should be clarified: It implies that Unite is built purely around young radicals, rather than members of the class. This is untrue. Of

the 14 current organisation staff at Unite, 9 started off their political involvement as shop-floor members of the union. A third are Māori, another third are from migrant/Pacific backgrounds. 10 are women. I’m not 100% sure, but I believe less than 6 of them have a tertiary degree or higher. The article implies that the organisers are middle class highly educated types at a distance to our members. This doesn’t correlate to the actual demographics of our organisation. All organisations face political problems as they develop, grow and evolve, and Unite is not immune to these problems. But Unite’s problem at present is not that we are overloaded with over-entitled campus Marxists.

# Fightback's Ten-Point Programme

**Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:**

1. **Constitutional transformation** based on Tino Rangatiratanga, Mana Motuhake and workers power. Tangata whenua and community co-ops to operate as kaitiaki over public resources.
2. **Secure, appropriate and meaningful work** for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be replaced with a Universal Basic Income.
3. **International working class solidarity.** Open borders, full rights for migrant workers. Recognition of Pasefika rights to self-determination. Opposition to all imperialist intervention and alliances, including New Zealand state's participation in military occupations, 'free trade' agreements and surveillance agreements.
4. **No revolution without women's liberation.** Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
5. **An ecosocialist solution to climate change.** End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.

6.     **Freedom of information.** End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
7.     **Abolish prisons,** replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
8.     **Universal right to housing.** Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
9.     **Fully-funded healthcare at every level.** Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to “top-down” efforts to change working people’s behaviour.
10.    **Fully-funded education at every level,** run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining kaupapa Māori approaches.

## How to get involved

There are two basic responsibilities for an active member of Fightback:

- Agreement with the 10-Point Programme
- Sustaining subscription to the magazine

If you meet these minimum standards and want to get actively involved, we can sign you up to our online network.

### How to subscribe

Two options are available for subscribing to the print edition of *Fightback*. \$20 a year will get you our quarterly issues, or a sustaining subscription is available for \$10 a month. International subscriptions are \$40 a year.

Please head to [fightback.org.nz/subscribe](http://fightback.org.nz/subscribe) to subscribe online.

Otherwise, please mail cash or cheques to:

Fightback

PO Box 10282

Dominion Rd, Auckland 1446

New Zealand

You may also contact us to purchase a copy or make any queries:

### Auckland

Daphne

[daphne@randomstatic.net](mailto:daphne@randomstatic.net)

### Wellington

Ian

0223858682

[ian.ndrsn@gmail.com](mailto:ian.ndrsn@gmail.com)

### National

[fightback.aotearoa@gmail.com](mailto:fightback.aotearoa@gmail.com)